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**Happy Returns: Today's mall promotions blend sales incentives and a bit of fun.**

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By Jane Adler

These days mall promotions seem a little bit like adolescents - somewhere between the serious grown-ups they're becoming and the still playful children they'd rather be. There's little doubt that today's promotions are more sophisticated. They have all the trappings of well-seasoned marketing campaigns with much attention paid to research, corporate objectives and measurable results. At the same time, many promotions still have a childlike eye on fun.

Increased competition from discounters and power centers, mall managers say, has forced them to take a no-nonsense look at results. Mall owners don't want just high traffic counts with a temporary blip in food court sales. Instead, promotional results are measured at the retailer's cash box. And even the big-hearted community programs are trying retailer tie-ins with sales incentives such as coupons and free gifts.

Market research techniques are being used more frequently to develop promotional programs, according to Alberta Davidson, national director of center marketing for The Hahn Co., San Diego.

'We do shopper intercept surveys once a year to get information on our trade area and on the center itself,' says Davidson, who adds that previously surveys had been done every two years. 'Market research directs our programs.'

Mall managers agree that basic research on the market area, customers and merchants should be the genesis of promotional programs, which can run the gamut from advertising to special events.

After conducting the market research, Davidson was prompted to implement so-called loyalty programs that emphasize what makes Hahn malls different from their competitors. 'We found that we probably couldn't entice shoppers to shop more, but we wanted to be their first choice,' she says.

Davidson also created a data base system to track loyal shoppers and quantify sales results - an old idea from retailing that is gaining favor in mall marketing circles. For example, regular shoppers at Hahn properties are sorted in a variety of ways - by zip code or preferred time of shopping - to focus direct-mail efforts. 'We can micro-market to a smaller group in a very specific way,' Davidson says.

Research also was key in the development of promotional programs at 2 million sq. ft. Tysons Corner Center in McLean, Va., which is managed by Dallas-based L&B Institutional Property Managers Inc. Debbie Withers, marketing director at the mall, says shopper intercept surveys as well as customer advisory groups give feedback on everything from bathrooms to mall maps.

For example, a recent intercept survey showed that people were interested in saving time so a data base program was developed to help shoppers find gifts more quickly. In short, the shopper visits the concierge desk and requests gift ideas for, say, an 8-year-old boy who likes soccer. The computer then prints a list of possible gifts available at stores in the center.

The promotional direction of Burnsville Center in Burnsville, Minn., also evolved from market research. The 1.3 million sq. ft. mall faced new competition not only from the giant Mall of America but also from a handful of discount-laden power centers.

'We did a market analysis to determine the effects of competition and

also to identify our most productive shoppers,' says DeAnn Dolan, marketing director at Burnsville Center, which is managed by New York-based Pembroke Management, Inc. Her research found that Burnsville shoppers were loyal, so promotional efforts were designed to capitalize on that through 'The Heart of the Center' marketing campaign. Collateral print materials highlighted employees at Burnsville Center. And promotions included gift-with-purchase offers and giveaways, such as season passes to Vikings football games. Dolan says of the 13 stores that participated in the first direct-mail piece, almost 1,000 responses were received.

At Plaza Frontenac, a 440,000 sq. ft. St. Louis center, management found that people were intimidated by the mall's upscale tenants like Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. So to make the center seem more approachable, 'Easy Evenings' were held every Wednesday for eight weeks last fall and winter. A popular local restaurant offered free food samples to shoppers and music was provided by live jazz bands.

Rena Abrams, marketing director at Plaza Frontenac, which is managed by Chicago-based Heitman Retail Properties, says that because the mall has no food court, it was the perfect vehicle to get people to relax in the upscale shopping environment. Newspaper ads announcing the event also included a return card that was brought in for a drawing to win dinner for two at a local restaurant. Approximately 400 people attended the event every Wednesday, she says.

Tracing results of specific mall promotions has become key to their success, say most mall managers.

Kim Vincent, corporate director of marketing for Dallas-based Marathon U.S. Realities Inc., says her company's 11 malls needed a viable promotional campaign to compete with Wal-Mart and 'provide an edge with the quality merchandise found in the malls.'

Vincent created the 'Check Out Our Values' campaign last spring to tell shoppers what was on sale in the mall each week. Newspaper and television spots were supplemented with in-mall flyers listing sale merchandise. Sales during the program have been evaluated every week, says Vincent, who notes, for example, an average increase in sales of 20 percent in one month for participating merchants at Killeen Mall in Killeen, Texas.

Most mall managers agree that the primary goal of most promotions today is sales.

'With any idea that is proposed, we always ask how it is increasing sales and if we can measure response,' says Sue Adamo-Carpenter, marketing director at Cumberland Mall in Atlanta, which is managed by Dallas-based MEPC American Properties Inc.

One measurable program Adamo-Carpenter recently launched is 'Shop and Dine, 5 to 9,' which is designed to boost mall traffic during off - peak shopping hours. When shoppers spend a certain amount of money during those hours, they receive 'dinner dollars,' which are good at mall restaurants or in the food court.

Jodi James, president of James & Company Marketing Services, an Irvine, Calif.-based consultant that specializes in mall promotions, says merchants are usually happy with increased traffic, but she doesn't recommend events without a merchandising angle.

'We always like some element to measure response with quantifiable results, whether it's a drawing or a gift-with-purchase. It helps get merchants to participate,' she says.

James points to the potent use of 'POGs' at the August grand opening of Cerritos Towne Center, a new 500,000 sq. ft. community center in Cerritos, Calif. Described as similar to old-fashioned milk bottle caps, that are printed with graphics or popular characters like Barney, POGs are the rage for West Coast children who collect them, and the promotions featuring them are hot. For the grand opening at Cerritos Towne Center, James created a POG tournament. Mall merchants promoted the event by handing out their own POGs with every purchase.

In addition, merchandise drawings were held during the opening and five different laser light shows were presented each night. To add a little sizzle, shoppers were invited to dress in padded suits if they wanted to participate in sumo wrestling contests.

Traffic builders that build sales appear to be the ultimate goal of marketing managers.

Fashion Place in Murray, Utah, a 1 million sq. ft. regional center

managed by Hahn, ran a 'Dinodasaurus' promotion last fall that drew more than 1 million visitors to the mall. Centered around an elaborate sand sculpture of dinosaurs in their own habitat, promotional extensions included bringing in experts from the Museum of Natural History and the local zoo. More than 5,000 school children attended the exhibit on weekends to learn about dinosaur life.

According to Andrea Harrison, the mall's associate marketing director, sales at the center increased 5 percent in September and 11 percent in October, which could only be attributed to the exhibit's traffic.

Chicago-based Homart agrees that the real objective of promotions is to get shoppers to spend more money.

'Our malls have good traffic,' says Eric Dewey, corporate programs manager at Homart. 'But 25 percent of the people don't buy anything. We are trying to convert those people into shoppers.'

For example, a deceptively simple program called 'Just Ahead' is being tested at Homart's 1.2 million sq. ft. Pembroke Lakes Mall near Fort Lauderdale. Based on the idea of interstate highway signs that draw travelers to restaurants that are 'Just Ahead,' Homart is using similar tactics to pull traffic through the mall. 'Just Ahead' signs for The Gap, for example, would be placed every few stores along one corridor of the center.

Dewey says the signs have kept people moving toward the 'pullers' while increasing impulse sales at the smaller shops along the way. Since Homart tracks individual retailer's sales each day, Dewey says the signage program increased sales immediately and that those jumps have remained steady since the program began last May.

A large category of successful promotions also address specific concerns at the mall or in the community.

Coronado Center, a 1.2 million sq. ft. mall managed by Heitman in Albuquerque, N.M., faced the growing perception that it was a risky place to shop. During the 1993 Christmas season, a mall merchant was assaulted and robbed. A purse snatching and reports of car thefts and shoplifting also gained widespread local coverage.

'Added to this, our main competitor went through a \$50 million remodel,' says Randolph M. Sanchez, marketing director of the mall. 'So we decided to be the first mall in the country to start a 'Crime Stoppers' program, which has been adopted by more than 900 cities.'

Coordinated in conjunction with 'Crime Stoppers' and the Albuquerque Police Department, the program features exterior signs throughout the center's parking lot. The signs encourage anyone with information about a crime to call 'Crime Stoppers,' and they can receive a cash award of up to \$1,000 for their information. Seminars on shoplifting and self-defense also were held for mall merchants, and security patrols were beefed up.

'Three months after the program was implemented, assault and battery incidents decreased by 62 percent and auto theft was down by 50 percent,' says Sanchez. 'Shoplifting decreased 45 percent during the period.'

With safety a hot promotional theme, Minneapolis-based General Growth Management designed a 'Play It Safe' campaign to educate young children about safety issues. The program was rolled out in 61 malls in June during National Missing Children's Month and featured interactive safety games, informational displays and workshops.

About 23,000 kids participated in the events, and mall traffic increased anywhere from 3 percent to 47 percent, according to General Growth's summary of the results. Retailers tied into the promotion with discounts or gifts for participating kids. As expected, most sales increases were seen at food vendors and children's stores.

Cathy Lickteig, vice president and director of corporate public affairs for The Rouse Co., Columbia, Md., says her company hopes that promotions build sales, but also that important programs aren't excluded just because people might not buy.

'There are things that are done for the good will of the community. We do a lot of things for seniors even though we know they are on fixed incomes and there is no expectation of huge sales increases,' Lickteig says.

Other mall owners and managers say there is still a place for 'goodwill' promotions even in the frugal 1990s.

For example, The Plaza Shopping Center in New Orleans, which also is

managed by General Growth, started a promotional program that invested in the community while also countering a negative perception that had developed about the mall. Called 'We're Investing in Schools Here' or 'W.I.S.H.', the campaign was designed to raise money for schools in East New Orleans.

Arnold Baker, general manager of the 1.2 million sq. ft. center, says more than \$65,000 was presented to 14 schools in the trade area after a nine-month effort. Another \$60,000 was raised by students through mall-sponsored events and fund-raisers.

And Indianapolis-based Simon held a successful community program the weekend prior to Mother's Day to increase awareness of breast cancer and various screening techniques. Called 'Take a Good Look at Yourself,' the program featured educational seminars, speakers, mammogram tests, medical experts and fashion shows. The promotion was implemented in 67 of Simon's centers nationwide.

Bill Filardi, general manager of the 950,000 sq. ft. Walt Whitman Mall in Huntington Station, N.Y., says his center's 'We Care' program was designed to show its concern for the community as well as help serve its customers. 'Ten percent of the population in our county is handicapped,' he says. 'That's part of our market, and we wanted to encourage them to visit our mall.' Started last fall, the 'We Care' program helped sensitize mall employees and store staff about the handicapped and offered special shopping days for the disabled.

And fund raising for good causes is still part of the corporate objective at Newton, Mass.-based New England Development. Seven of its malls sponsored 'A Magical Evening of Giving' last November. The promotion was held on one night where, for a \$5 admission fee, people could enjoy private shopping, entertainment and prizes.

When the results were tallied, Greendale Mall in Worcester, Mass., raised \$16,000 for the University of Massachusetts Children's Center, and Northshore Mall in Peabody, Mass., drew 18,000 people raising more than \$85,000 for charity, according to company reports.

Raising money to promote good will, boosting traffic in the shopping center and increasing overall retail sales are all reasons cited for the importance of mall promotions. But it is measurable results - an increase in the bottom line - that really makes mall owners stand up and take notice.

Jane Adler is a Wilmette, Ill.-based free-lance writer.

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**Hotels reap rewards of saver deals**

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A special offer is helping to boost UK leisure bookings at Seattle's hotels.

Seattle hotels are seeing leisure business increase as more operators take advantage of the city's Super Saver programme.

The promotion, a joint venture between Seattle's convention and visitors' bureau and the private sector to boost **off - peak** business, offers up to 50 per cent off rack rates and discounts at shops, **restaurants** and tourist attractions.

Among the hotels in the scheme is the 173-room Mayflower Park, one of the few independently-owned properties in the downtown area.

'We have been working with the UK market for the last five or six years,' said sales director June Assenberg.

Operators featuring the Mayflower Park include North American Travel Service and Funway Holidays.

'This has been an incredible year for Seattle. We have picked up a lot of business from areas such as Florida and Los Angeles which have had problems,' said Ms Assenberg.

The Mayflower Park, with published rates from \$110 single and \$155 double, claims a year-round occupancy of 80 per cent. It is a member of the Grand Tradition consortium of small, independent, luxury hotels.

The hotel is linked with Seattle's major downtown shopping mall, the Westlake Centre.

Greater Seattle has 23,000 hotel rooms, including 8,000 in the downtown area. The only new hotel planned is a three-star, 125-room property by WestCoast Hotels. Opening is scheduled for March 1996.

Demand for more hotels is set to increase in 1996 when the Port of Seattle opens an international conference centre on the waterfront. The complex will handle meetings of up to 300 people.

The reconstructed native American setting of Tillicum Village makes for one of Seattle's most popular tourist excursions.

About 100,000 visitors each year make the eight-mile crossing from Seattle to Blake Island. Last year the numbers were boosted by President Clinton and 14 overseas leaders who chose Tillicum as venue for the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation summit.

The four-hour excursion, which operates up to three times a day in summer, includes a narrated boat tour of Seattle harbour and a buffet meal and entertainment in Tillicum's cedar 'longhouse'.

With an average of 280 people at each sitting, the food is surprisingly good. Highlight is fresh salmon, cooked over alder fires - a traditional north-west Indian method.

The meal is followed by a colourful stage show featuring native American dances and music. While the set and special effects are impressive, it has to be said that Indian dancing, by its very nature, does not lend itself to Broadway.

The 30-minute show is repetitive and a trifle too long - not helped by a cliché-ridden narration. That said, youngsters will undoubtedly love it.

After the show, visitors have another half-hour to browse in the Indian crafts shop, mingle with members of the cast or explore the island before the return boat trip to Seattle.

The Tillicum Village excursion costs \$45 for adults.

Tillicum Village and Tours, 2200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 804, Seattle, Washington 98121. Tel: 0101-206-443-1244.

Howard Carr.

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HEADLINE: RestaurantRow.com Launches "Top Table" and Opens the Doors to New York City's Most Sought After Restaurants

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Oct. 27, 1999-- You Don't Have to be a Celebrity to Eat at Moomba or in the Forbes 400 to Get a Table at the Four Seasons

RestaurantRow.com (www.restaurantrow.com), the World's largest online restaurant guide and reservation service, today launched Top Table, an online reservation system designed to provide access to some of the most exclusive New York City restaurants including the famed Jean Georges, the esteemed 21 Club, the tony Four Seasons and the super-chic Moomba. Launching in New York but soon expanding to major cities such as Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles, Top Table is a restaurant lover's entre to some of the most desired restaurants in the World. By registering for Top Table, RestaurantRow.com users will be given access on a first-come, first-served basis to tables which have been secured at famed restaurants where getting a reservation is often next to impossible. "The Internet continues to make a significant impact on the restaurant industry and we feel it is important to find new ways to bring our audience of preferred diners together with our top 'status' restaurants. Top Table is the perfect solution," said Jim Gurfein, RestaurantRow.com's CEO. Starting today, and at 3pm Eastern on every Monday, RestaurantRow.com will post tables it has secured at top restaurants and will enable diners to choose the date and time of their reservation. Top Table will show the available restaurants, times and number of available tables. Once a table is selected and confirmed it will no longer be viewable at the site. New York's Four Seasons Restaurant, general manager Alex Von Bidder said, "Reservations through the Internet are as inevitable as the telephone and RestaurantRow has done the research to be a dominant force in this space." RestaurantRow.com culled through its industry-leading database of more than 110,000 restaurants from 47 countries and in 7,000 cities, to find the hard-to-get reservations. In most cases, users can find descriptions, menus, photos, and a wealth of other related information about the restaurants. Restaurants participating in the program typically offer tables on a weekly or bi-weekly basis at off-peak times for parties of 2 to 6. "Top Table benefits both restaurant patrons and the restaurants themselves and

that helps us fulfill our goal of providing valuable services to both diners and dining establishments alike" said Mr. Gurfein.

#### ABOUT RESTAURANTROW.COM

RestaurantRow.com ([www.restaurantrow.com](http://www.restaurantrow.com)) is the leading online restaurant resource and reservation service provider boasting the largest and most comprehensive restaurant listing on the Internet. RestaurantRow.com has created a space where consumers can find their restaurant of choice by searching from a broad database of quality information. In addition to providing reservation services, RestaurantRow.com will soon offer consumers e-commerce solutions through the company's online food ordering service and online shopping mall.

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